

2021.06.06 SERMON 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

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"Who are my mother and my brothers?" That was Jesus's question.

And perhaps we would add, "and who are my sisters?"

Or as parents we might expand the question to ask, "Who are my children?"

You can guess why I'm asking this question. Upon hearing the news of a burial site with 215 small bodies on the grounds of the Residential School in Kamloops many have expressed shock and horror. And grief, deep grief. Because can't we stretch to imagine what it would be like? to have our children taken from our homes and placed in a school where they died under mysterious circumstances. If we do not know the wrenching pain of losing a child - and some of us do - we surely can imagine it. I believe we can imagine the grief, the pain, the keening sorrow of the parents and grandparents. We can imagine the profound loss to an entire village who have helped to raise that child. Or perhaps we cannot begin to imagine it if we've not been through that ourselves. As Christians we are compelled to ask ourselves, "Who is my family? Who are *my* children? Who are my mother and my brothers and sisters?" Are we not? Jesus has an answer for us: *"Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."*

Whoever does the will of God. Jesus makes that clear also, doesn't he. Here is the first and great commandment, Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind and all thy strength. And the second is like unto it - love your neighbour as yourself.

Or to give you a direct quote from Mark (because what I just said is from my memory) So as Mark puts it:

"The first [commandment] is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:29-31 or as The Message bible puts it:

Jesus said, "The first [commandment] in importance is, 'Listen, Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.' And here is the second: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' There is no other commandment that ranks with these."

Can't get much clearer than that, can we! How does this reflect on the 215 children? Jesus makes that clear too - if we are family to Jesus then those children are part of our own family too. If we are to love others, those children and all their extended families are included. No exceptions. Can you doubt for even a micro-second that

those children were beloved of God? Is there any way you could stand up and claim that those children were not precious to God? I do not think so.

And in this passage from our Gospel when Jesus speaks of Satan he is referring to whatever gets in the way of, throws up obstacles to, or tries to destroy or undermine the compassionate and reconciling love of God. I suggest to you that whenever we have denied the awful truth of what took place in the residential schools, whenever we have insisted that it wasn't as bad as all that, whenever we have doubted the integrity of the witnesses to that destruction of the lives of small children, whenever we have said "Why don't they just get over it"... we are turning away from God's compassionate and reconciling love. We are denying God's own desire for the children of humanity. Is that really what any of us want to do? Is that really our heart's desire? - to reject the love of God, a love based in justice and mercy, based in the inclusion of all the children of humanity, all of them worthy of love. Do we really want to claim that sometimes, some children deserve cruelty or abuse?

Which brings us to the really painful question: why has it taken the discovery of these buried children for so many of us to believe what we were already being told by the survivors of those infamous schools? Why couldn't we listen to those stories and be horrified without any tiny bodies being found? What got in our way? What gets in our way right now, today? I suspect it's partly this: we have been taught stories by people who love us and want only the best for us, stories of racism. Stories that paint an entire people, the indigenous peoples of Canada as less than the rest of us. Less intelligent, less graced, less valuable, less sacred.

But that is not the story Jesus has for us. Jesus's story is the one that tells us one simple message - we are to love God and love one another. Through love we are to seek God *in* one another. Through love we are to stand up to and speak out against anything that claims some people are not God's beloved. Through love we are to reject any stories that want us to believe some people are not really God's people, that some people don't really belong to the human tribe of God's beloved. Those stories, my friends, are the voice of evil, trying to turn you and I against others, against each other. Thank goodness we are free to choose. Thank goodness we are called to something much better, much more beautiful, much more life-sustaining than that. Thank goodness we are called to love one another and to love God. That is what will save us from the evil one - our capacity to love. So have at it and don't let any seductive little voices tempt you away. Cleave to the light of love, the light of God. You were born for just that.

Amen.